

A

BRIEF SKETCH
OF A LECTURE
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
ESSEX INSTITUTE, MAY 12, 1856,
RESPECTING THE FOUNDERS OF
Salem and the First Church.

SALEM :

WILLIAM IVES AND GEORGE W. PEASE, PRINTERS.

OBSERVER OFFICE.

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Monday, May 12, 1856.

Evening Meeting. The President, Hon. D. A. WHITE, in the chair. After reading records, list of donations and correspondence since the last meeting, the President occupied the hour with a lecture upon certain important matters of record and history pertaining to the Fathers of Salem and the First Church. A brief sketch only will be presented here.

Judge W., referring to a remark of the late Mr. Adams, the "old man eloquent," in his Address on the New England Confederacy, before the Massachusetts Historical Society, that it was one of their pre-eminent duties to preserve the good name of our forefathers, observed that it became our more especial duty to protect that of the fathers of Salem from all injurious representations as we ever might with the broad shield of truth. With such views he had explored some of our ancient church records and other historical documents as faithfully as he could, and now brought the results of his humble labor, octogenarian labor—and to be appreciated accordingly. Yet he could truly say that it had been a labor of love from his grateful veneration of our forefathers—a veneration that had grown upon him as he more nearly approached the world where they are. It was a trite remark, because so obvious and just, that no people on earth owed more to their ancestors than the people of New England; and Salem, perhaps, of all New England, was the most deeply indebted. Here they had exerted, in a signal manner, their wisdom and energy in planting the seeds of freedom, piety, and learning, the fruits of which we so richly enjoyed. We were bound to study their principles and institutions, and to preserve them unimpaired.

The main purpose of the lecture was to correct certain errors contained in two recent publications in relation to the

institution of the First Church in Salem, the first organized church in New England; and more especially the very important error that instead of the one truly scriptural "confession of faith and covenant," adopted by the First Church at its foundation, there was established together with the covenant a test creed, or sectarian articles of faith, to which subscription or assent was required in order to church membership. These publications were,—"The Ecclesiastical History of New England," by Mr. Felt,* and a new edition of "Morton's New England's Memorial," containing an appendix, so arranged as to misrepresent the real meaning of the author as well as that of Cotton Mather, the two original and indubitable authorities on the subject.† The correction of these errors was demanded of us in justice to the memory of our forefathers, as well as by the sanctity of history and the importance of the principles involved in the question. The fundamental rule inculcated by Cicero, that "the historian must never dare to utter what is false, or to suppress anything that is true, and must always keep his mind above prejudice or partiality," had been sanctioned and enforced by the highest Christian authorities; "truth being the very life and soul of history." The publications referred to having been issued by the "Congregational Board of Publication," and one of them highly extolled for its "thoroughness of research and accuracy of statement," it became the more necessary to correct their misrepresentations concerning the First Church, as otherwise error might supplant truth at the very foundation of our ecclesiastical history.

There were three sources of evidence, each of which was conclusive, to prove that the First Church had never adopted any such test creed, or articles of faith.

1. The avowed principles of the founders of the church.
2. The authentic history of its foundation.
3. The ancient records of the church.

* The Ecclesiastical History of New England, by Jos. B. Felt. Boston. 1855—p. 115 and 267.

† New England's Memorial—6th ed. Boston : 1855—p. 459.

1. The principles of the founders were purely congregational, and as understood by themselves required their strict adherence to the Scriptures in constituting the church. This too was their declared purpose. Great wrong was done them in confounding their principles with their opinions; things essentially distinct. Opinions were variable and transient; principles, fixed and eternal. Opinions belonged exclusively to the individual holding them; principles, to the whole community in common. Opinions could not be a guide for any but the holder of them, nor always a safe guide for him; but fixed principles safely guided all, both in forming their conduct and their opinions also. This distinction was well understood by the fathers of Salem, and nobly manifested by them in constituting their church, according to their genuine congregational principles, and not in perpetuation of their peculiar opinions.

2. This glorious fact was confirmed by authentic history. The foundation of the First Church, being a memorable transaction, had been recorded with more fullness and accuracy than that of any other church. Governors Endicott and Bradford, with the ministers Higginson and Skelton and other eminent characters, were earnestly engaged in their inquiries to ascertain the true scriptural foundation of a Christian church. "And accordingly it was desired of Mr. Higginson to draw up a confession of faith and covenant in scripture language; which being done, was agreed upon." So stated Secretary Morton, in his New England's Memorial, and Cotton Mather, in the Magnalia, recorded it at length, omitting the preamble of its renewal in 1636, and the postscript added in 1660, giving the true original "Confession and Covenant" of 1629. Though variously termed, and most commonly "the covenant" simply, one and the same instrument was always intended;—"the instrument," as Judge Davis called it, "venerable for its antiquity, and estimable for its mild and benignant spirit;";* which was published in London in 1644, and included by Han-

* Morton's Mem. Davis's ed. p. 391

bury among his select "Memorials of the Independents," and which Dr. Bentley, in his History of Salem, said, had been "recorded in every History of New England." Yet in the recent copious Ecclesiastical History of New England, it found no place excepting some mutilated sentences introduced apparently to disprove its authenticity. And in the appendix to the new edition of Morton's Memorial it was treated in a way still less worthy and more perversive of its true character.

Morton and Mather entirely agreed as to the manner of admission into the church, particularly described by the latter as follows:—"Some were admitted by expressing their consent unto their Confession and Covenant; some were admitted after their first answering to questions propounded unto them; some were admitted, when they had presented in writing such things, as might give satisfaction to the people of God concerning them; and some, that were admitted, orally addressed the people of God in such terms as they thought proper to ask their communion with; which diversity was perhaps more beautiful than would have been a more punctilious uniformity. But none were admitted without regard unto a blameless and holy conversation."^{*}

The accounts of both Morton and Mather were expressly sanctioned by Rev. John Higginson, an eye witness of the foundation of the church and perfectly acquainted with its discipline and history.[†] The facts stated by Mather had doubtless been furnished by Mr. Higginson himself; and they demonstrated that no test creed, or prescribed form of confession, could have been used in the admission of members.

3. The records of the church afforded the same clear demonstration. These records, as contained in the present old church book, consisted of transcript records from 1636 to 1659, and of original records from the settlement of John Higginson in 1660, to the dismission of Samuel Fisk in 1735. The transcript records, copied from a former book, comprised the

* *Magnal.* 1. 19. fol. ed.

[†] See Appendix and Note.

original covenant as given by Dr. Mather, under the sanction of Mr. Higginson, with the preamble of its renewal in 1636, and the postscript, or Quaker clause, added in 1660 by Mr. Higginson, and a marginal note in the hand writing of Mr. Fisk ;* also, the names of the first thirty members of the church, and those afterwards added before the settlement of Mr. Higginson, together with an account of baptisms from 1636 to 1659.

As regarded the present question the records might be considered complete. It sufficiently appeared from the proceedings of the church, at its first meeting, after Mr. Higginson's settlement, Sept. 10, 1660, that all important matters must have been copied from the former book. A committee, then appointed "to review the church book," &c., consisting of "Major Hawthorn, Mr. Battis, Mr. Price, the two deacons, together with the pastor,"—represented, "That they conceived the book itself and the paper of it being old, not well bound, and in some places having been wet and torn and not legible, is not like to continue long to be of use for posterity; therefore they thought it best if it were kept in safety by the elders, *by that means it may be of good use so long as it will last.*" Only some few passages in it which do reflect upon particular persons, or upon the whole church without any church vote, and without due proof, they did mark in the book as thinking they should be struck out."

Mr. Higginson thus had possession of the whole former book as well as the transcripts from it. He was very exact in his church records, especially in what related to the admission of members. But no intimation was to be found in the whole church book of any test creed, or prescribed articles of faith, having ever been adopted, or used, in the First Church.

A single instance from his records of admission was enough to show the spirit of the whole. "1678, at a church meeting, March 9, (after naming eight persons)—these eight having been

* See Appendix.

propounded a month, no exception coming against them, they making their profession of faith and repentence in their own way, some by speech, others by writing, which was read for them, they were admitted to membership in this church, by consent of the brethren, they engaging in the covenant."

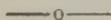
Thus appeared the entire agreement of authentic history and church records with the principles of the founders in proving the freedom of candidates for church membership in making confession of their own faith in their own way. The Cambridge Platform, of 1648, showed the spirit in which such confessions were to be met on the part of the church; inculcating "such charity and tenderness to be used as the weakest christian, if sincere, might not be excluded nor discouraged."

It might be asked, as it sometimes had been, "what possible difference," whether such candidates were required to subscribe to "a written confession," or to make in some other satisfactory mode a profession of their faith? The difference in the two modes was self evident and manifestly essential. One accorded with the right of private judgment and the acknowledged sufficiency of the Scriptures; the other contravened these fundamental principles of protestantism. The one was in harmony with the spirit of congregationalism; the other adverse to it. The one in its tendency was beneficent; the other, pernicious. The one led to increasing knowledge and love of Christian truth; the other tended to stifle the spirit of free inquiry. The one, in short, was a delightful privilege, the other an odious imposition.

Our forefathers, of the first generation, were, indeed, "noble Bereans" in settling their principles of church polity,—searching the scriptures daily for divine guidance. We all venerated their principles, though in following them out we might now be led to different conclusions and reject some of their opinions. So too, we all admired the spirit which actuated them, and blessed God for its glorious results, while we felt obliged to disapprove some parts of their conduct; for where on earth was to be found human perfection! Charity would gladly throw

her mantle over errors, which our fathers might have committed in common with other great and good men of their day, while gratitude delighted to indulge her warmest admiration of the wisdom, energy, and fidelity to principle, which raised them above the spirit of their age, above all sectarian influence, and even above the bias of their own darling opinions, in their steadfast adherence to the scriptures as their only guide and standard in the constitution of their churches.

A P P E N D I X .



Here is presented a transcript of the two first pages of the old Church book; all in italics excepting the original Covenant of 1629.

Gather my Saints together unto me that have made a Covenant with me by sacrifice. Psa. 50: 5:

6. of 6th Month, 1629, Wee whose names are under written, members of the present Church of Christ in Salem, having found by sad experience how dangerous it is to sitt loose to the Covenant we make with our God: and how apt wee are to wander into by pathes, even to the loosing of our first aimes in entring into Church fellowship: Doe therefore, solemnly in the presence of the Eternall God, both for our own comforts, and those which shall or maye be joyned unto us, renewe that Church Covenant we find this Church bound unto at theire first be inning, viz: That we covenant with the Lord and one with an other; and doe bynd ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as

he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth. And doe more explicitely in the name and feare of God, profess and protest to walke as followeth through the power and grace of our Lord Jesus.

1. First wee avowe the Lord to be our God, and ourselves his people, in the truth and simplicitie of our spirits.

2. Wee give ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the word of his grace, for the teaching, ruleing and sanctifyeing of us in matters of worship, and conversation; resolveing to cleave to him alone for life and glorie; and oppose all contrarie wayes, canrons and constitutions of men in his worship.

3. Wee promise to walke with our brethren and sisters in this Congregation with all watchfullness and tendernes, avoyding all jelousies, suspitions, backbyteings, censurings, provoakings, secrete risings of spirit against them; but in all offences to follow the rule of the Lord Jesus, and to beare and forbear, give and forgive as he hath taught us.

4. In publick or private we will willingly doe nothing to the offence of the Church, but will be willing to take advise for ovrselfes and ours as occasion shalbe presented.

5. Wee will not in the Congregation be forward eyther to shew oure owne gifts or parts in speaking or scrupling, or there discover the fayling of oure brethren or sisters, butt atend an orderly cale there unto; knowing how much the Lord may be dishonoured, and his Gospell in the profession of it, sleighted, by our distempers, and weaknesses in publyck.

6. Wee bynd our selves to studdy the advancement of the Gospell in all truth and peace, both in regard of those that are within, or without, noe waye sleighting our sister Churches, but useing theire counsell as need shalbe: nor laying a stumbling block before any, noe not the Indians, whose good we desire to promote, and soe to converse, as wee may avoyd the verrye appearance of evill.

7. Wee hearby promise to carrie our selves in all lawful obedience, to those that are over us, in church or commonweale, knowing how well pleasing it will be to the Lord, that they should have encouragement in theire places, by our not greiveing theryre spirites through our iregularities.

8. Wee resolve to approve our selves to the Lord in our particular calings, shunning ydlenes as the bane of any state,

nor will wee deale hardly, or opressingly with any, wherein we are the Lord's stewards : alsoe promysing to our best abilitie

9. to teach our children and servants, the knowledg of God and his will, that they may serve him also ; and all this, not by any strength of our owne, but by the Lord Christ, whose bloud we desire may sprinckle this our covenant made in his name.

This Covenant was renewed by the Church on a sollemne day of Humiliation 6 of 1 moneth 1660. When also considering the power of Temptation amongst us by reason of ye Quakers doctrine to the leavening of some in the place where we are and endangering of others, doe see cause to remember the Admonition of our Saviour Christ to his disciples, Math. 16. Take heed and beware of ye leaven of the doctrine of the Pharisees, and doe judge soe farre as we understand it yt ye Quakers doctrine is as bad or worse than that of ye Pharisees: Therefore we doe covenant by the help of Jesus Christ to take heed and beware of the leaven of the doctrine of the Quakers.

After a single blank leave in the Church book comes the " Catalogue" of Church Members extending to 1659. The names of the first thirty only are here given :

A Catalogue of the Names of those that are joined in full communion.

Samuel Sharp,	John Sibly,
John Endecott,	John Baulch,
Phillip Veren,	Samuel Moore,
Hugh Larkin,	John Holgrove,
Roger Conant.	Ralph Fogge,
Lawrence Leach,	John Horne,
William Auger,	John Woodberye,
Francis Johnson.	William Traske,
Thomas Eborne,	Townsend Bishop,
George Williams,	Thomas Read,
George Norton,	Richard Rayment,
Henry Herricke,	Jeffry Massy,
Peter Palfrye,	Edmond Batter,
Roger Maurye,	Elias Stileman,
Thomas Gardener,	Edmond Giles.

NOTES.

Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia*, says, “Mr. J. Higginson and Mr. W. Hubbard have assisted me and much obliged me with information for many parts of our history.”

In his “Attestation,” prefixed to Mather’s *Magnalia*, or “Church History of New England,” dated “Salem, 25th of the first month, 1697,” Mr Higginson says,—“As for myself, having been by the mercy of God, now above sixty-eight years in New England, and served the Lord and his people in my weak measure, sixty years in the ministry of the Gospel, I may now say in my old age, I have seen all that the Lord has done for his people in New England, and have known the beginning and progress of these churches unto this day, and having read over much of this history, I cannot but in the love and fear of God bear witness to the truth of it.”

“JOHN HIGGINSON.”

Dr. Mather, having given the original covenant, here printed in Roman letters, immediately subjoins the following remarks:

“By this instrument was the covenant of grace explained, received, and recognized by the First Church in this colony, and applied unto the evangelical designs of a church-estate before the Lord. This instrument they afterwards often read over, and renewed the consent of their souls unto every article in it; especially when their days of humiliation invited them to lay hold on particular opportunities for doing so.

“So you have seen the nativity of the First Church in Massachusetts Colony.

“As for the circumstances of admission into this church, they left it very much unto the discretion and faithfulness of the Elders, together with the condition of the persons to be admitted. Some were admitted by expressing their consent unto their confession and covenant;” &c., as before quoted on the 6th page.

As Morton’s Memorial, first published in 1669, also bears the sanction of the venerable Higginson as to its “truth of matter,” we here continue the passage, commenced on page 5th, marking in italics the words which prove that the confession of faith and covenant was

but one instrument. Indeed, a formula of faith distinct from the covenant was a thing unheard of in the formation of the early congregational churches of New England.

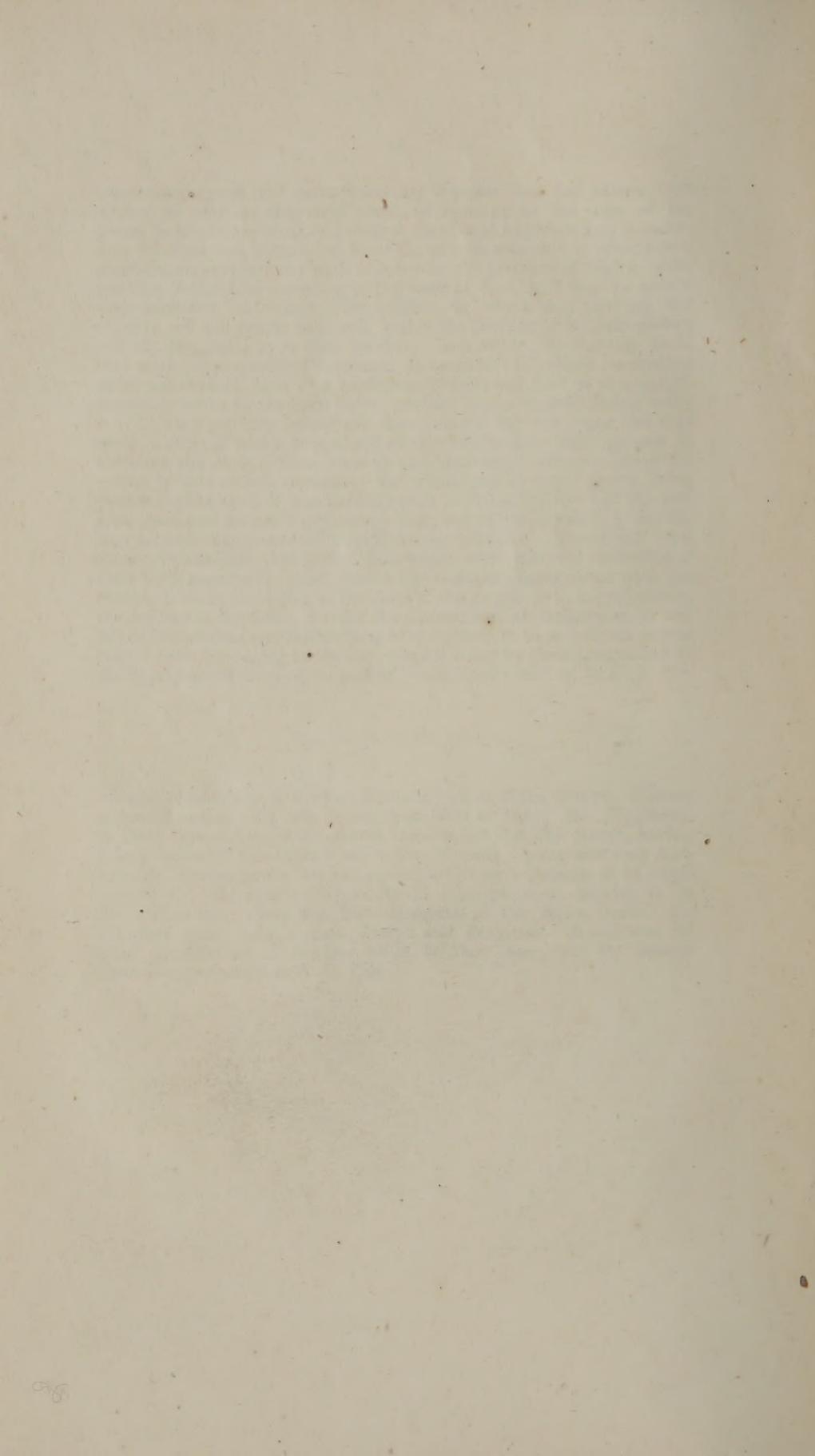
"Accordingly it was desired of Mr. Higginson to draw up a confession of faith and covenant in scripture language; which being done, was agreed upon. And because they foresaw that this wilderness might be looked upon as a place of liberty, and therefore might in time be troubled with erroneous spirits, therefore they did put in one article into the confession of faith, on purpose, about the duty and power of the magistrate in matters of religion: Thirty copies of the aforesaid confession of faith and covenant being written out for the use of thirty persons who were to begin the work. When the 6th of August came, it was kept as a day of fasting and prayer, in which, after the sermons and prayers of the two ministers, in the end of the day, the aforesaid confession of faith and covenant being solemnly read, the forenamed persons did solemnly profess their consent thereunto; and proceeded to the ordaining of Mr. Skelton pastor, and Mr. Higginson teacher, of the church there. Mr. Bradford, the Governour of Plimouth, and some others with him, coming by sea, were hindered by cross winds, that they could not be there at the beginning of the day, but they came into the assembly afterward, and gave them the *right hand of fellowship*, wishing all prosperity, and a blessed success unto such good beginnings. After which, at several times, many others joined to the church in the same way. The confession of faith and covenant forementioned was acknowledged only as a direction, pointing unto that faith and covenant contained in the holy scripture, and therefore no man was confined unto that form of words, but only to the substance, end and scope of the matter contained therein. And for the circumstantial manner of joining to the church, it was ordered according to the wisdom and faithfulness of the elders, together with the liberty and ability of any person. Hence it was, that some were admitted by expressing their consent to *that* written confession of faith and covenant; others did answer to questions about the principles of religion that were publicly propounded to them; some did present their confession in writing, which was read for them; and some, that were able and willing, did make their confession in their own words and way; a due respect was also had unto the conversations of men, viz: that they were without scandal."—*New England's Memorial*, Davis's Ed. p. 145.

Rev. W. Hubbard and Rev. J. Higginson, referred to by Dr. Mather as his assistants in compiling the *Magnalia*, having been intimate friends, the former doubtless received from Mr. Higginson much of his information respecting the institution of the First Church. The following brief extracts from Hubbard's History of New England are therefore added to the preceding:

"But they had not as yet waded so far into the controversy of church discipline, as to be very positive in any of those points wherein

the main hinge of the controversy lay between them and others ; yet aiming as near as they well could, to come up to the rules of the gospel in the first settling of a church state, and apprehending it necessary for those who intended to be of the church solemnly to enter into a covenant engagement one with another in the presence of God to walk together before him according to the word of God, and then to ordain their ministers unto their several offices, to which they were by the election of the people designed, scil. Mr. Skelton to be their pastor, and Mr. Higginson to be their teacher. In order to the carrying on of that work, or preparation thereunto, the said Mr. Higginson, according as he was desired, drew up a confession of faith and form of church covenant according to the Scriptures ; several copies whereof being written out, they publicly owned the same, on the day set apart for that work, a copy of which is retained at this day by some that succeed in the same church.....There were at that time thirty persons joined together in that church covenant ; for which end so many copies being prepared beforehand, it was publicly read in the assembly, and the persons concerned solemnly expressing their assent and consent thereunto, they immediately proceeded to ordain their minister....Those that were afterward admitted unto church fellowship, were with the confession of their faith required to enter into a like covenant engagement with the church, to walk according to the rules of the gospel, as to the substance, the same as at the first ; but for the manner and circumstances, it was left to the wisdom and faithfulness of the elders, to be so ordered as was judged most conducing to the end, respect being by them always had to the liberty and ability of the person.”—*Hubbard's Hist. of N. E.* p. 119.

JOHN HORNE, one of the first thirty members of the Church, deserves a special notice. He was deacon from 1629 to 1684. Mr. Higginson, in 1680, says of him in the church records,—“ Our bro. Horne, having been Deacon of this Church above this 50 years, being now very Antient, the Church proceeded and agreed to choose 2 Deacons to be added unto him.” He finally dropped the H from his name, signing it, in his will ORNE. From him have descended all the Salem Ornes. He left four sons, John, Symon, Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph was the great grandfather of the late Capt. William Orne, and Dr. Joseph Orne who graduated at H. C. 1765.



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